



Countering Allegations of Apartheid

Apartheid was the system of ethnic separation used in pre-1992 South Africa.

In principle, the white minority government set up a situation where it had power and superiority over the black majority. These laws were racially motivated and were upheld by brutal military domination. Apartheid finally fell, in part because of a wide spread international campaign to punish the white South African government for these practices.

Pro-Palestinian activists co-opt the memory and emotions connected to Apartheid and use its tropes to smear Israel. By equating the Palestinian cause with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, opponents of Israel cheapen and sully the memory of those who peacefully fought with justice and honor against Apartheid.

When confronted with Palestinian propaganda that attaches the term apartheid to Israeli policy, keep in mind the following points:

- ❑ Apartheid in South Africa was **racial separation** imposed on citizens of the **same country**. Black South Africans were denied rights and intermingling between different ethnic groups was forbidden.
- ❑ **Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza are not citizens of Israel**. They are citizens of the Palestinian authority, voting in PA elections.
- ❑ The Israeli Palestinian conflict is not a racial conflict. It is instead a **national-territorial conflict between two nationalities**.

It is undeniable that the Palestinians living in the West Bank endure difficult living conditions, and often have their freedom of movement curtailed. **These are the security measures necessitated by the surge in Palestinian terrorism beginning in 2000.** Since the imposition of these security measures, Palestinian terrorism has dropped significantly. **Restrictions on freedom of movement are temporary, but death is permanent.** Checkpoints and the security barrier are the unfortunate price of the security that Israel, as an independent state, has an obligation to deliver to its citizens. The same applies to the charge that Palestinians in the territories have different color license plates than Israeli citizens and that they are restricted from driving on certain roads. This was a response to Palestinian road violence, including sniping at cars. Similarly, Israeli citizens are forbidden from entering areas of the West Bank under PA control, again, because to do so would be a grave security risk. In 2000, two Israelis who accidentally wandered into Ramallah were brutally lynched by a mob of more than 1,000 people.

It is very important to point out that this policy of separation is not racially motivated. If there were a racial motivation behind the separation of Israelis and Palestinians in the territories, logically, one would assume that there would be a racial separation of Jews and Arabs in Israel proper. This is, of course, not the case.

Jews and Arabs have equal rights under Israeli law. In the Jewish Israeli population, little over half of all Jews are of Middle Eastern origin and Israeli society as a whole is incredibly diverse and multicultural.

Apartheid is specifically a racially motivated separation of peoples. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a national conflict regarding land. Any conflation of these two types of conflict is inherently mendacious and misleading. When Israel is called an apartheid state, the bitter memory of apartheid is being misappropriated and cynically used to make a cheap political attack. Calling Israel an apartheid state is especially malicious because it's an easy tactic. The word apartheid carries a full load of connotations – use of the comparison evokes a strong emotional response. Nobody wants to listen to, or understand, carefully nuanced truth. It's easy to let a loaded word do the explaining for you. The avoidance of complexity is true for any cause; pro-Israel activists often ignore or belittle the very real suffering of the Palestinian people. It is important to make clear that criticism of Israel's actions in the conflict is completely acceptable. We might not agree, and we have every right to say why, but voicing anti-Israel opinions is not inherently mendacious. **On the other hand, calling Israel an apartheid state is a blatant obfuscation.**

The letter below is an example response to the claims that Israel is an apartheid state. It uses many of the points and arguments made above:

The reasons given by Students for Justice in Palestine in the article, "Pro-Palestine Students Call for Boycott of Israeli Goods", to justify their divestment campaign from Israel are deceptive and quite dishonest. Mr. Doe's comparison of Israeli democracy to South African apartheid is fallacious and offensive to the memories of Black South Africans living under apartheid. Israel is one of the most multicultural and multi-ethnic countries in the world. Israelis, Jewish, Arab and Christian, have full political rights and access to the most freedom of expression in the Middle East. Israeli Arabs serve in the Israeli Parliament, have their own political parties and are a vital part of Israeli democracy. An Israeli Arab serves on Israel's supreme court and Israeli Arabs study, teach and engage in constructive debate at all of Israel's universities. Additionally, Israel is one of the few countries in the Middle East with full freedom of religious expression. Many Israeli Arabs (Aren't they only Druze?) proudly serve in the Israeli Defense Force and Arabic is an official state language.

In the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians make their own laws and elect their own leadership. Sadly, the preponderance of terror attacks against Israel and the tendency of the Hamas Palestinian leadership to resort to violence instead of providing essential services has necessitated the need for checkpoints and curfews, which are indeed a burden on Palestinian residents. However, Israel has voluntarily left Gaza and was prepared to additionally leave the West Bank. In return, Israel suffers daily rocket attacks on its civilians. Unlike the Palestinian leadership, Nelson Mandela never advocated bombing buses full of school children, or enjoyed the potential for self-determination that the Palestinians now hold in their hands. Thanks Students for Justice in Palestine for obfuscating a nuanced conflict and spreading misunderstandings and falsehoods instead of hope and justice.